



TAKECHARGE

WELCOA'S SELF-CARE BULLETIN

Stuttering

MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK

Stuttering is a communication disorder in which the flow of speech is broken by repetitions (li-li-like this), prolongations (lllllike this), or abnormal stoppages (no sound) of sounds and syllables. And it affects more people than you might think. Roughly 3 million Americans have this speech disorder. Scientists are learning about what causes people to stutter, and genes tell a big part of the story.

People with stuttering know exactly what they want to say. They're just unable to say it at the rate they would like. Stuttering affects about 1 in 20 children. Most will outgrow the disorder on their own or with the help of a professional called a speech-language pathologist.

However, about 20–25% of children who stutter will continue into adulthood. This condition is known as persistent developmental stuttering. Overall, about 1% of adults stutter, and it's much more common in men than women.

CAUSES OF STUTTERING

Researchers are still working to fully understand what causes stuttering but they do know that it often runs in families. It's 15 times more likely that a sibling of a person who stutters will stutter than a random person in the population.

By studying families with multiple people who stutter, researchers have identified several genes that can cause stuttering. Mutations in these genes have now been found in people around the world who stutter. These



studies suggest that genetics likely play a role for many people who stutter.

All the genes identified so far are involved in a process inside the cell called intracellular trafficking. This process helps direct things in the cell to their proper locations. Problems with intracellular trafficking have recently been recognized in other neurological disorders, like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. However more research is needed to understand how it impacts speech and stuttering.

Scientists are also using brain imaging scans to better understand brain activity in people who stutter. This may help show why some children outgrow stuttering and hopefully lead to better treatments one day.

COPING WITH STUTTERING

For those who stutter, communicating with others can be difficult. It can cause anxiety about speaking and

lead them to avoid talking. This, in turn, can affect relationships, self-esteem, and quality of life.

It's common for people who stutter to be able to speak without stuttering when in a low-stress environment. They may have no problem speaking fluently with a pet or baby, for example. Singing or speaking together in a group can also lessen stuttering. But stuttering often gets worse if they're feeling tired or anxious.

For now, treatment for stuttering involves therapy with a speech-language pathologist. Many of the current therapies aim to make speech smoother. Some work to change the thoughts that can bring on or worsen stuttering. Electronic devices are also available to help those who stutter manage their speech.

While stuttering can be an obstacle, there are many resources to help overcome it.



HOW YOU CAN HELP THOSE WHO STUTTER

- » Be patient and focus on what the person is saying.
- » Listen attentively when the person speaks and wait for them to say the intended word. Try not to finish sentences or fill in words.
- » Avoid saying things like “relax” or “slow down.”
- » Speak at a relaxed pace and pause often. This can help reduce time pressures the person may be experiencing.
- » If your child is stuttering, set aside some time each day to talk with your child when he or she has your undivided attention and contact a speech pathologist if stuttering lasts over six months.